

Against the Grain

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Booklover--Voices

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than **Francis Paul Prucha**. No single subsequent work has superseded *The Great Father*, and none likely ever will. *The Great Father* represents a particular, pivotal moment in Native American studies. It would not be written today. Yet in ways real, imagined, and compelling, it is rewritten in parts by most every new work in Native American studies concerned with tribal sovereignty. Today's scholars — many members of, or descended from, Indigenous peoples themselves — neither feel the need to challenge **Prucha's** assumptions, nor neglect the enduring importance of his contributions. As today's scholarly interests focus on the ongoing fashioning and elaboration of tribal sovereignty, historic policy and politics remain fundamental. Where **Prucha** saw tribal sovereignty effaced over time, the writing and rewriting of the story of Indigenous peoples, never more attuned to sovereignty and self-determination than now, will still find use again and again for **Prucha's** most enduring work. 🌿

Endnotes

1. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.*
2. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*. Abridged edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
3. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*. Abridged edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Humanities E-Book, Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Press. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.00563.0001.001>
4. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.
5. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.*
6. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976.*
7. **Prucha, Francis Paul.** *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.

Editor's note: An asterisk () denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.

In my world, there is great anticipation every autumn waiting for the naming of the **Nobel Laureates**. Once the **Literature Laureate** is named, the process of exploring their literary works, discovering a little something about them and then — most important — the decision about which work to read begins. This year's **Nobel Prize in Literature** was awarded to **Svetlana Alexievich** "for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time." The daughter of a Belarusian father and a Ukrainian mother who writes about suffering, this will make for choice Christmas reading.

As this process was taking place, an article appeared below the fold of the *Wall Street Journal* in the place where the often quirky, sometimes unknown, random fact, and sure-to-entertain feature always appears. This particular feature was entitled: "High in the Himalayas, Bhutan Finds Money can be a Downer-Gross National Happiness Index Trumps GDP; 'extensively' vs. 'deeply' content." Sound familiar? In 2013 when **Alice Munro** was named the **Nobel Literature Laureate**, I shared with you the concept of "Gross National Happiness" in connection with **Munro's** book *Too Much Happiness*. The connection with **Alexievich** appeared in the same edition on the last page of the Opinion section in the *Notable & Quotable* featuring a portion of **Alexievich's** Nobel lecture. She speaks of communism and socialism, dreams and battles, history and reality, and the "slaves of utopia" who believed in the Soviet mentality on these subjects. One of her books available in English carries the title *Voices from Chernobyl*. I download it to my Kindle and with a shot of cold vodka I begin to read. The antithesis of happiness is upon me.

Simple staccato sentences stirred from interviews collected by **Alexievich** in 1996 and translated by **Keith Gessen** create the individual nature of this **Nobel Literature** experience. A disaster of the magnitude that could have wiped out a large segment of this planet was created by the individual and contained by the individual in a society that works as a collective. Each story is unfathomable, hard to digest, ugly in its subject matter, powerful in its telling, and crafted elegantly to express the ultimate impact on each individual that lived in the Zone, worked in the Zone, cleaned up in the Zone.

One nice feature of a Kindle is electronic highlighting. At times I wanted to highlight the entire book. The best way for you to hear the voices is to share them with you:

"Question: Is the world as it's depicted in words the real world? Words stand between the person and his soul."

"You immediately found yourself in this fantastic world, where the apocalypse met the stone age. And for me it was sharper,

barer. We lived in the forest in tents, twenty kilometers from the reactor, like partisans. Partisans are the people who get military training. We were between twenty-five and forty, some of us had university degrees, or vocational-technical degrees. I'm a history teacher, for example. Instead of machine guns they gave us shovels. We buried trash heaps and gardens."

"And the place was so beautiful! Really incredible. The horror was more horrible because it was so pretty."

"We'd ask each other: is this what our life is like? It was the first time we saw it from the outside. The very first time. It made a real impression. Like a smack to the head... There's a good joke: the nuclear half-life of a Kiev cake is thirty-six hours. So... And for me? It took me three years. Three years later I turned in my Party card. My little Red book. I became free in the Zone. Chernobyl blew my mind. It set me free."

"In my opinion — we're the raw materials for a scientific experiment, for an international laboratory. There are ten million Belarussians, and two million of us live on poisoned land. It's a huge devil's laboratory. Write down the data, experiment all you want. People come to us from everywhere, they write dissertations, from Moscow and Petersburg, from Japan and Germany, and Austria. They're preparing for the future."

"The most popular fable in the Zone is that *Stolichnaya Vodka* is the best protection against strontium and cesium."

"There was a black cloud, and a hard rain. The puddles were yellow and green, like someone had

poured paint into them. They said it was dust from the flowers. Grandma made us stay in the cellar."

"Chernobyl is a metaphor, a symbol. And it's changed our everyday life, and our thinking. Sometimes I think it'd be better if you didn't write about us. Then people wouldn't be so afraid. No one talks about cancer in the home of a person who's sick with it. And if someone is in jail with a life sentence, no one mentions that, either."

Teachers, liquidators, journalists, wives of liquidators, children, village residents, photographers, scientists, Party members, former directors — "These people had already seen what for everyone else is unknown. I felt like I was recording the future." **Svetlana Alexievich** 🌿

